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ABSTRACT

To become fluent readers students need to become proficient in recognizing words. Word recognition is a skill and not an end in and of itself. This paper cites the following reading behaviors of students who do poorly in word recognition: (1) read in a halting manner; (2) identify words incorrectly; (3) fail to read in thought units; (4) mispronounce closely spelled words; (5) do not use phonics to recognize unknown words; (6) reread words and phrases which have already been identified correctly; (7) do not try to identify the unknown words; (8) call words aloud but do not understand what has been read; (9) insert words when reading; and (10) omit selected words while reading content. The paper then discusses in detail the 10 poor reading behaviors. (NKA)

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Assessing Student Word Recognition Skills.

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ASSESSING STUDENT WORD RECOGNITION SKILLS

Students need to become proficient in recognizing words in order to become fluent readers. Word recognition is a skill and not an end in and of it self. The ultimate goal in reading instruction is to have learners read with comprehension and meaning. Students who do poorly in word recognition engage in the following behaviors:

1. read in a halting manner.
2. identify words incorrectly.
3. fail to read in thought units.
4. mispronounce closely spelled words.
5. do not use phonics to recognize unknown words.
6. reread words and phrases which have already been identified correctly.
7. do not try to identify the unknown word.
8. call words aloud but do not understand what has been read.
9. insert words when reading.
10. omit selected words while reading content.

The list might go on to include dyslexia which deals with learners transposing words and letters within a word. Dyslexia may also include failing to remember from one school day to the next what was taught in reading. Each of the ten enumerated items will be discussed in terms of assessing student achievement in word recognition.

Reading in a Halting Manner

Here, the student generally identifies words correctly when reading, but words tend to be pronounced in isolation from each other. A good reader is able to read fluently the sequential words which follow each other. This tends to make for meaning and understanding of content read. While teaching in a two teacher school (1955-1957), the author taught a fifth grade student who read in an extremely halting manner. Larry identified many of the words correctly but read in an extremely jerky manner whereby learners in the next room with a sliding door in between could hear him read aloud readily. When Larry pronounced words orally, he had to work very hard and became extremely tense doing so. The author talked to his father who would not hear about using a basal one grade level below the one Larry was in. During the 1950s, reading specialists recommended using an easier text or one which was on the present reading level of the involved student. No other teacher had been able to assist Larry to read fluently. His halting manner of reading certainly hindered comprehension in reading. The author as teacher of grades five through eight believed initially "he could do it" in helping Larry become a fluent reader. With much effort put

into teaching Larry to read fluently, very little progress was made. In fact, the parents of the other children in the classroom complained about the teacher spending too much time with Larry and ignoring the others. Larry might have benefited from a teacher who could devote much time to assist him to read more fluently. Materials of instruction too were lacking such as library books and supplementary readers. A teacher also was needed to communicate with Larry's parents much more frequently than was possible.

It is important to accurately diagnose individual student needs in reading and then offer appropriate remediation help. A more relaxed environment in a room removed from classmates for remedial reading would also have been helpful. With developmentally appropriate reading materials and much quality assistance, Larry could have improved considerably much to become an increasingly so, fluent reader. Along with becoming a more fluent reader, Larry's comprehension should have improved much.

Identifying Words Incorrectly

If students exhibit a pattern of incorrect word identification, there are several approaches which may be used. These include the following:

1. having students notice the correct word compared with the incorrect word chosen. The two words could be placed side by side, written in neat manuscript print on small cards. Here, the learner needs to notice likenesses and differences.
2. having a drill and practice game whereby the student is presented the correct word on a card by a peer. Other words which cause problems may be placed on a separate 3x5 inch card. The student experiencing difficult in recognizing selected words then receives practice in word recognition.
3. having a tutorial or drill/practice software package in which the student needs to fix careful attention upon selected words which have caused difficulty in word recognition. Technology used in teaching and learning situations is fascinating to selected students and assists them to achieve more optimally.
4. having the student look carefully at the correctly spelled word which was incorrectly identified initially, with the intent of reading it more carefully. Haste and carelessness may be a cause of incorrect word identification.
5. having parents assist the offspring at home in identifying words correctly and doing this with care. Parents need to help the teacher do the best job of reading instruction possible, with good human relations in evidence. This assistance should be provided by parents in addition to reading aloud to the offspring as well as listening to the child read orally in the hone setting.

Failing to Read in Thought Units

Selected students fail to read in thought units and then do not comprehend what has been read. Thus, a student may read the following incorrectly, "Easy, Joe Shirley will be here soon." Instead, the reader has omitted the proper placement of a comma which when read correctly is as follows, "Easy Joe, Shirley will be here soon." Students need to clearly understand how meanings change dramatically when certain punctuation marks are missing. Notice the following pairs of sentences:

1. someone, help please!
2. someone help, please!

1. Don't quit!
2. Don't, quit!

1. "Stop!" he shouted.
2. "Stop?" he shouted.

For true clarity, punctuation marks need to be read properly in the following to notice how many food items were at the picnic:

1. At the picnic, they had ham, sandwiches, jello, salad, and milk.
2. At the picnic, they had ham sandwiches, jello, salad, and milk.
3. At he picnic, they had ham sandwiches, jello salad, and milk.

Students need to be taught and understand why reading in thought units is important. Punctuation marks do serve a vital role in oral and written communication.

Mispronouncing Closely Spelled Words

Mispronouncing closely spelled words can certainly make for problems in comprehension and meaningful reading. Students need to look at words carefully in order to become proficient readers. Pointing out to learners why the meaning changes when a word is mispronounced is important. Notice the following two sentences with sentence number one being the correctly printed sentence in content being read:

1. The house stood on a hill.
2. The horse stood on a hill.

Meticulous reading is necessary since one letter in each word "u" versus "r" makes a complete difference in meaning within the sentence. Sometimes, the error will be straightened out as the student continues the reading activity, due to a "house" being described rather than a

"horse." Sometimes, the context provides a clue as to which word is wanted within the sentence, such as in the following:

1. the house (not horse) which was painted red stood on the hill.
2. the horse (not house) ran on the hill.

Students need to read words carefully and then notice if a wrong word is being pronounced at a specific time or within context.

Failing to use Phonics in Reading when Needed

The English language has a certain amount of consistency between symbol and sound to warrant students studying phonics for application purposes in spelling and reading. To be sure, there are also inconsistencies between graphemes and phonemes.

There are spelling words which pattern and have a very consistent grapheme/phoneme relationship, such as in the following words:

1. ban, can, fan, man, ran, pan, tan,van.
2. bat, cat, fat, hat, mat, pat, rat, sat.

There are words which contain selected consistencies between symbol and sound, such as in the following:

1. memory, century, factory, drapery. In the first word, "mem," is spelled very consistently between symbol and sound. In all four words, the "y" ending makes for a consistent long "e" sound.
2. chair, choice, chalice, chocolate. Two initial consonants in each of these words make for a single consistent sound. Inconsistencies need to be learned by sight and by pattern.

There are selected words which follow a pattern such as the consonant, long vowel sound, consonant, silent "e" pattern, as in the following: bake, cake, fake, sake, make, lake, take, rake.

Extreme inconsistencies between symbol and sound abound in the following pattern of spelling: through, bough, dough, cough, rough. These words all pattern with the "ough" ending and yet the "ough" phoneme varies much in pronunciation from word to word. Which statements for teacher guidance may then be made to assist in teaching phonics in the reading curriculum?

1. phonics is valuable for instructional purposes up to a point. Where consistencies reign, phonics can be valuable as a tool for students to use in word recognition. Even in the word "phone," the long "o" sound with the silent "e" letter makes for a consistent symbol/sound relationship. The letter "n" is very consistent with its related phoneme.
2. inconsistencies between grapheme/phoneme relationships will

need to be taught using a sight method approach.

3. meaningful practice within a reading situation, contextually, needs to be provided learners in the use of phonics. Isolated drill/ practice in phonics learning tends to emphasize separating phonics from obtaining meaning in selections read. Excessive stress on phonics instruction, too, may make for strong analytical readers who do not focus upon on meaningful content. Phonics is a tool to identify words so that fluent reading results to secure facts, concepts, and generalizations.

4. phonics instruction is valuable for young readers so that there is an available approach, such as associating graphemes and phonemes, when an unknown word is encountered in reading.

5. the whole language versus phonics instruction debate may be resolved by teaching what a student needs to become a good reader. Whole language reading instruction only, or phonics instruction only, is a ridiculous argument. Learning styles of students differ; some will learn to read well with whole language whereas others need tools such as phonics to comprehend content more thoroughly and fluently (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Three).

Rereading Content Unnecessarily

Students who read fluently orally or average achievers may reread content which has already been read accurately. For example, the student may have read the entire sentence accurately, but repeats reading what has been underlined: The man and the boy hunted eagerly <u>for a long time</u>. Why do students reread what has been read correctly? There are differences of opinion here.

1. a student may reread a part of the sentence in order to have time to focus son the next sentence to be successful in oral reading. This gives the reader time to view the beginning part of the next sentence and be successful in recognizing these words. However, this approach does waste time in fluent reading in order to increase comprehension.

2. the student lacks confidence in that he/she is unsure of having read the repeated words accurately.

3. the student has developed a bad habit of repeating correctly read words.

What can be done to assist these readers to develop improved habits of reading?

1. the teacher, reading specialist, or a peer may hold a 3x5 inch card over words that have been read aloud successfully. The reader then cannot go back to see the words read correctly, but must zero in upon the next sequential paragraph.

2. the teacher and the involved student may discuss why the latter

rereads unnecessarily. A plan may be developed to overcome this problem in reading.

3. a thorough diagnosis of the "rereading" problem should be made to ascertain what the problem is specifically. Is the content too difficult to read? Is the student overly tense when reading orally in front of others? How was this habit developed? Definite plans should be made to improve reading habits. Wasting of time is a further problem which students have, such as looking out the classroom window or staring at the point of a pencil (Ediger, 2000, 20-29).

Not Attempting to Identify Words

There are a few students who do not attempt to identify unknown words. With no or minimal attempts made, the learner will not progress as much as is possible in word recognition. Word recognition is a tool to use in reading subject matter be it expository, narrative, or creative. Thus students need to make attempts to identify the unknown even if mistakes are made. The teacher definitely should encourage, not ridicule attempts made to recognize any unknown word. When the student tries, the teacher can better analyze what a learner does not stress in the act of word selection. The error may be due to faulty use of phonics, bad study habits,inadequate use of context clues, and/or interest in reading. Students who lack courage or will to identify unknown words need encouragement and praise for doing so. Words which students do not attempt to identify are the following:

1. excessively long words.Syllabication skills may need to be taught here so that the leaner makes attempts to identify the unknown word.

2. words which lack consistency between symbol and sound. These words may need to be learned through the use of context clues or drill and practice methods using flash cards.

3. words not used commonly in reading and speaking. These words need discussing as to meaning and review.

Word Calling

Sometimes, students call or "read" words without understanding what is being read. Comprehension of content is the ultimate goal of reading, not calling words with no idea as to what has been read. Students who are word callers need assistance in telling what has been read. They need to realize that reading comprehension is different than merely saying one word after the next when reading aloud. The teacher or a peer may have comprehension questions for the word caller to answer pertaining to subject matter read. Continuous assessment in this manner will guide the learner to realize that ideas need to be gleaned

from reading aloud. The student then will focus upon content read rather than merely calling aloud words that have been read in sequence. Comprehension then includes the following:

1. recalling ideas read.
2. understanding ideas read. Here, the learner tells in his/her own words about subject matter read.
3. applying what has been read in diverse ways. With application, the student uses that which has been read. Ways of using what has been read includes writing summaries and conclusions, doing an art project, making a construction item, as well as engaging in creative and formal dramatizations using content read.
4. analyzing ideas read. Here, the student separates ideas into component parts such as separating facts from opinions, fantasy from reality, as well as accurate from inaccurate ideas.
5. synthesizing subject matter. After analyzing content read, the student needs to put it together again, leaving out those things which have no value to the ongoing lesson or unit of study.
6. assessment. The student then needs to appraise the worth of what has been read. Assessment needs to be done in terms of appropriate criteria. The value of content read then needs to be ascertained.

A good render moves up the ladder of complexity in reading subject matter from diverse genres'. A word caller then has a long way to go to reach toward the top in reading skills.

Inserting and Omitting Words

There are students who insert unneeded words when reading. Sometimes the meaning of the sentence does not change with the inserted words. For example, in the following sentence the meaning is not distorted when reading and omitting the underlined word:

1. He played with the dog and <u>the</u> cat. Compare sentence #1 with #2 where omitting the underlined word in reading does alter the sentence meaning:
2. He <u>played</u> with the dog and the cat.

There are selected questions which need answers when assessing omitted words in student reading. These include the following:

1. should an error be counted in oral reading when an omitted word does not change the meaning of the involved sentence?
2. how closely must student reading be assessed to include any deviation from the actual printed script if inherent meaning is not

affected?

3. might students become word callers if they do too much of literal reading to include each and every word?

Some mistakes made in reading may straighten themselves out with sequential reading of sentences. Thus, new content read may modify one's thinking of subject matter acquired which modify previously incorrect reading. Minor omissions such as the word "the" as noticed previously, may not change any meaning from the writer's original intent. Certainly, the reading teacher must assist the student to obtain the inherent meaning of subject matter read. Incorrect meanings established do not help the learner to become a fluent and accurate reader (See Ediger, 1999, 17-20). Graphophonics, semantic, and syntactic cuing systems, as well as prior knowledge, provide students with strategy options. As part of learning and self monitoring behaviors, children ... ask themselves questions as they read that correspond to the cuing systems, such as, "Does it make sense (semantic), "Does it look right?" (graphophonic), and "Can we say it that way?" (syntactic)... (Short, Kane, and Peeling, 2000, 287.

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